

The Truth Commission: 2 Years On

As 2020 draws to a close, so too does the Truth Commission's second year in operation. This snapshot provides a brief overview of the commission's work to date and points to some of the challenges that might arise in its upcoming final year of work. A more detailed look ahead to 2021 will be tackled in the next snapshot.

Recomposition of the Commission

In only two short years, the commission has had to reconfigure itself as a result of the early and unanticipated deaths of two commissioners. Alfredo Molano, a well-known sociologist and writer, and perhaps one of the most engaged Colombians in working to understand the conflict through its regions, died on 31 October 2019. Commissioner Ángela Salazar passed away whilst carrying out her duties on 7 August 2020, leaving behind an immense legacy with respect to the recognition of Afro-descendant communities, their victimisation during the conflict, and their contribution to the truth.

Alejandro Castillejo and Leyner Palacios were appointed as commissioners to replace them. The former is a recognised academic who has previously been a consultant to the Truth Commission in Peru and has advised the Group for Historical Memory in Colombia. Palacios is a victim of the Bojayá massacre who has dedicated himself to representing other victims of this tragedy, as well as working with Afro-descendant communities in the Pacific.

The Gathering of Testimonies

The commission has overcome the obstacles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to continue its work in gathering testimonies. These can be given individually or as a collective and up to 30 June 2020, the commission had successfully conducted 8,977 interviews and had heard accounts from over 16,500 people. 1,339 of these correspond to testimonies given by ethnic communities and 2,323 mention those alleged to be responsible.

It is also important to mention the work which the commission has been carrying out abroad. During 2019, the commission collected 353 testimonies across five previously established regions: Europe, North America, the Andean region, Central America, and South America. This activity has continued at a steady pace during 2020, such that over 1,000 testimonies have now been successfully collected abroad, in over 23 countries, in cooperation with different civil society actors.

Recognition

The recognition of victims continues to be one of the fundamental pillars of the commission. Through different acts of recognition, the commission seeks to create trust with victims in territories where state presence has historically been minimal, and where, during the conflict, different armed groups played a fundamental role in intimidating and attacking the civilian population. During 2019, the commission used a broad strategy of social dialogue, encompassing 'Truth Encounters', 'Dialogues for Non-Repetition', and 'Spaces for Contribution to the Truth'. These were carried out in different areas across the country, in order to listen to the testimonies of both victims and victimisers. These efforts, which promote the reconstruction of the social fabric, were carried out in conjunction with 28 Truth Houses scattered across Colombia.



Rodeemos el Diálogo



@RodeemosDialogo



@RodeemoselDialogo



Rodeemos el Diálogo

Despite the pandemic this year, the commission has managed to adapt and successfully continue its work around recognition. 2020 has seen events including a Truth Encounter, where thousands of voices from those exiled and now living across the world were heard, as well as encounters focused on the Indigenous Truth, during which voices from the indigenous communities that were caught in the middle of the conflict demanded greater protection from the Colombian state.

Among the commission's other significant recent achievements is the participation of actors of the conflict, who have gradually started to recognise their respective responsibilities. In particular, it is important to highlight that the FARC has accepted its role in the kidnapping and murder of several political leaders, including the kidnapping of Ingrid Betancourt and the murder of Álvaro Gómez Hurtado. On their part, military officials have also provided the commission with their version of the truth concerning the role that they played in the conflict.

The commission has been developing a differential approach focused on hearing the voices of those sectors of the population that were victimised most severely and who are particularly vulnerable due to the lack of state protection. These include the categories of ethnicity, gender, disability, children and youth, and the elderly, among others.

Looking to the Future

The commission has been constructing a support network with national and international organisations to facilitate the wide distribution of its final report. 689 allies have been identified, including embassies of different countries, multilateral organisations, and international cooperation agencies, as well as 116 specific projects that have been developed and financed by the international community. One of these projects, for instance, is the Quibdó Truth House, supported by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. These projects demonstrate the international community's fundamental role in and commitment to the Colombian Truth Commission's work to overcome the historical difficulties that the country has faced over the last few decades.

Embrace Dialogue celebrates the commission's work during its first two years of operation, recognises its progress and invites society to embrace the commission in its final year.



Rodeemos el Diálogo



@RodeemosDialogo



@RodeemoselDialogo



Rodeemos el Diálogo